Historical Society of Palm Desert

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The Hourglass

Community
Service
Collections
Archives

SUMMER 2006 **VOL. 13, NO. 2**

SPRING LUNCHEON WITH SHEILA GILLIGAN

April 19, 2006 - Parks & Recreation Community Center

It was one of the best!! The social hour put everyone in the mood for what Dick Folkers had lined up for the afternoon. The tables looked great with bowls of gorgeous roses, thanks to Kay McCune. President Hal Rover called the meeting to order at noon. Incoming board members and officers were assembled and installed by Councilman Dick Kelly. With guitar and local folk tunes, John Malcolm Penn delighted the crowd. The buffet meal served by Sherman's Deli, with apple turnovers and whipped cream for dessert, was out of this world.

Then we were treated to a talk by a lady we all know. At least we thought we knew her, because she has worked in our city hall since 1975. Now, because she was kind enough to personalize her talk, we can refer to her as the Assistant City Manager we all know and love. In telling her life story, Sheila cautioned us to remember that you can't polish a tennis shoe, so don't expect too much.

Born and raised in Jamestown, New York, she was one of five children. She credits her mother with her up-bringing; a school teacher who shared her Swedish background of faith, moral values, honesty and integrity with her youngsters. Most of all, this mother imparted a strong work ethic to her daughter. Sheila attended Katherine Gibbs School in Boston, which was as much further education as she wanted.

After graduation, sunny California beckoned. Her first job was with the Angels; so she got to know Gene Autry (and Champion, not Trigger), Jimmy Piersall, Bobby Knopp, and Jimmy Fregosi. Despite the glory of the baseball scene, Sheila got really homesick and skedaddled back to Jamestown. Before long, she exercised a woman's prerogative to change her mind and retraced her steps to the west coast. "They say you have to leave and then come back before you truly value California," she says with a grin.

In 1972 after marrying her best friend, Jerry Gilligan, they moved to the desert in November of that year. Jerry had two children, Todd and Tara, and Sheila enjoyed participating in raising them. What with schooling and all the trappings that go with rearing a family, it was only natural that Sheila would meet and befriend others in the community .... people like Hal and Angie Rover and John Marman.

Desert life was wonderful until May rolled around. The first experience of desert heat became a reality causing Sheila to remark, "I thought I was in hell, but just hadn't died yet! Boy, was I wrong ... I was really in heaven."

Almost 31 years ago Sheila went to work for the City of Palm Desert. It was only two years after incorporation, and the city hall was located on Prickly Pear Lane just off of El Paseo. In 1975 the population numbered 4,400 and the small community was off and running toward quality growth that would make it the envy of the Coachella Valley. There were only two signals on Highway 111; the intersection of Highways 74 and 111 warranted only a four-way stop. There was no place to shop, and the movie theater reminded you of a jail house. What about supermarkets? There were Market Basket and Village Market, also Sunshine Meat, Fish and Liquor. One of the first restaurants was the Iron Gate on Highway 74.

Sheila Gilligan (continued)
El Paseo had only a few stores which closed during the summer with tinfoil in the windows. "Christmas in July" was a golf cart parade that was held in spite of the heat. Other summertime activities were Pony League baseball games with the gang at Olesen Field -- parents could be nasty rooters!

For the young city government the daily grind couldn't have been described with words anything like "peace and harmony." The early pioneers seemed to thrive on controversy, and many would contest what didn't jibe with their opinions of the way things ought to be. People fought about 'line of sight', and no two stories matched. Many decried the installation of curbs and gutters, because 'we must stay a bedroom community.' Street lights were definitely out, because they would ruin the beautiful star-lit nights. The Frontage Roads along Highway 111 merited headlines in the local newspapers for months... to fix them or get rid of them ... everyone had an opinion.

Desert Beautiful wanted the city to 'put back our palm trees.' All were excited to finally meet Cliff Henderson at the public hearing about the palm trees. The city did put the palm trees back (where the Arco Station is now) you can see a landmark 90-foot tall palm, give or take.

In 1976 'Kathleen', the flood that hit on September 10th, deposited tons of mud in Palm Desert. They had to bring in the Marines to dig citizens out. Sheila says that people threw stones at their car. The damage and financial results of the disaster had residents' emotions in high key.

There was still no shopping, but life was getting better and better. Sheila's social life was branching out by this time. She joined the Soroptimist International of Palm Desert, chaired the 'Mr. Palm Desert' contest at the Erawan Gardens (now Miramonte), and promoted a community park at Olesen Field. The Tina Sinatra Teen Center was the object of many a charitable effort, like 'Kans for Kids.' Eventually, the Center merged with the YMCA.

Many residents supported Proposition A to get a fire department in Palm Desert. They raised $4,000 in one night by giving a party to roast Mayor Ed Mullins, one of the most popular men in town. The effort was so strong that it helped pass measures in Indian Wells and Rancho Mirage as well. Today we have three fire stations with another on the way, 67 firemen, and paramedics that could start their own TV show. Sheila says she saw them in action when they came last May and saved her husband's life.

Finally, shopping appealing to women came to Palm Desert !!! In the early 1980's the Palm Desert Town Center mall was proposed, but not without controversy. A group that called itself the SOB's (Save Our Businesses) and Councilman Pulugi opposed the project. Enter a wonderful elderly woman who spoke at the public hearing. In no uncertain terms she told the SOB's that if they didn't like it, they could pick up their marbles and go home. The mall was dedicated in 1983 with the May Company as its first store. A year later the Marriott Desert Springs opened, and everyone was so excited to meet Mr. Marriott. Palm Springs thumbed its nose at both our mall and our hotel. Mayor Pulugi stated on television ... "one city's trash is another city's treasure" ....and he was right.

It was then that a dark cloud hovered over Sheila's life. She began to battle cancer, a battle that many joined with their prayers and compassion. It was a battle that she won, a battle that launched great effort on her part to aid others who were fighting the same battle. Sheila Gilligan has contributed so much to so many; she will never be forgotten.

After a wonderful presentation about early Palm Desert, and comments about each Councilperson who has served the city from the beginning, Sheila had this to say. "Though I was born and raised back east, I *grew up* right here in Palm Desert. Our family became part of a community that was a community, and I found a job I loved. Thank you for your friendship .... thank you for your support. You are Palm Desert, and I am proud to be among you."

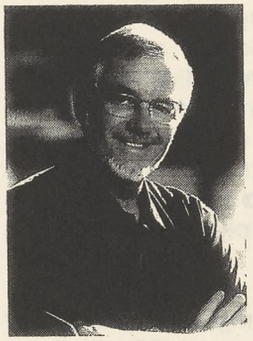
ARCHITECTS & ARCHITECTURE

On February 23 a number of Society members attended a documentary film titled "Desert Utopia" at the Palm Springs Art Museum. The Coachella Valley has the largest concentration of important mid-twentieth-century modern architecture structures in the United States. Featured architects were Lautner, Neutra, Schindler, Cody, Frey, Wexler, Williams and Krisel. Society members Jim West and Kim Housken participated in the film.

BUFORD CRITES HONORED AT FOUNDER'S DAY CEREMONY

May 13, 2006 - City Hall Council Chambers - 2:00-4:00 p.m.

This year was the 25th anniversary of a tradition started by the Society in 1982. The relevant day each year is May 15th, because on that day in 1946 Clifford Henderson turned over the first shovelful of sand on the 17 lots he had purchased on the south side of Highway 111. In memory of that date, local citizens who wanted to see Cliff recognized as the founder of Palm Desert instituted the Founder's Day ceremony in 1982. The Historical Society of Palm Desert was the main organization to organize the presentation of the trophy, the unveiling of the bust on El Paseo, and the gala party at Shadow Mountain Club that followed. Though we move the date a couple days on either side of May 15th each year to promote better attendance, the Society hopes to continue this event into the future years of the relevant history of Palm Desert.



The man chosen by the committee this year to receive the Founder's Day award has been in the desert since 1976. Buford Crites was born and raised in Owensville, Missouri in the rural Ozarks. He obtained his education in Missouri, Illinois and Utah. The list of his academic experience, community activities and awards is longer than your arm. Buford has been an important mover and shaker in Palm Desert's history in three basic arenas.

First, he was a Professor of Communication at the College of the Desert. Teaching people to communicate is basic to success in business, politics, or whatever career field college students choose. If you have heard Buford give a speech of any length, you know that his expertise is much appreciated by those who hear him. Dr. Maria Sheehan spoke about Buford's work at the college.

Second, he has served on the City Council since 1986, including four terms as mayor. In this position Buford has stirred up some controversy at times, mostly having to do with his environmental concerns. Councilman Dick Kelly spoke about camping with Crites. He said he wouldn't talk about his career in politics because he still has to work with him -- so we didn't hear any roast-type comments.

Third, Buford's dedication to the environment has been evident here in the valley, especially in his work with the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy. He is involved with many decision-making organizations in the valley and beyond having to do with conservation. Katie Barrows spoke about his dedication to environmental issues.

After hearing his praises sung, Buford accepted the award plaque with a very short speech. He said it was humbling to be considered worthy to be the 25th recipient of the Founder's Day award, each of whom in their individual lives have played a special role in local history.

Third Annual Palm Awards

This ceremony has been added to the Founder's Day event for the past three years. It was initiated to recognize the efforts, both in volunteer time and finances, of community-minded citizens. The recipients this year are:

Jane Foster - Friends of Tools for Tomorrow - presenter: Rachel Druten, Board President
Birgit Moller - College of the Desert Foundation - presenter: Samuel S. Hook, Executive Director
Jo Rosen - Parkinson's Resource Organization - presenter: Eileen Callahan, Programs Director

THANK YOU to the Founder's Day/Palm Awards Committee who spent countless hours planning and executing all aspects of this event.....Joyce White, Bonnie Bowie, Dick Folkers, Lois Bradstreet, Hal Rover, Harold Bird, Anne Tuttle, and all who lent a helping hand for set-up and clean-up. Success followed your efforts.

JOSHUA TREE FUNDRAISER

On Friday evening, April 28, the Folkers represented the Society at a fundraiser hosted by the Joshua Tree National Park Association. It was held out-of-doors at Cabot's Old Indian Pueblo museum in Desert Hot Springs. The giant wooden sculpture of an Indian head appears as a sentinel over the complex of unending tiers of adobe rooms that causes one to be awe-struck. An excellent B-B-Q dinner, a silent auction, a presentation of gorgeous scenic photos with live commentary, and original folk songs with guitar music were all part of the evening.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON RETREAT

On May 5 and 6, the Society sponsored a "first" in its history -- a chance for board members to get away from everyday life in order to brainstorm about the long-term goals for the organization. The seminar was ably conducted by Pat Scully, a hard-working member of the City of Palm Desert staff. We are very appreciative of the invaluable guidance she gives in her role as liaison between the Society and the City. The retreat entailed an over-night stay at a motel in Old Town Temecula where our workshops were held. Prior to our trip back to the desert we were treated to an enlightening tour of the Temecula Valley Museum by Dick Fox. Suffice it to say that we were *slightly green* with jealousy upon seeing the expansive exhibit, storage and work areas in the spacious two-story structure.

Our group meetings were attended by Hal Rover, Hellie Harrison, Jean Ernst, Barbara Keedy Eastes, Brett & Rose Romer, John & Madonna Marman, Anne Tuttle, and Dick & Ginny Folkers. Pooling everyone's ideas, examining our strengths and weaknesses, defining our duties as volunteers, reassessing our programs and projects, and setting our goals for the future helped to make our work a team effort; putting us "on the same page" so to speak. We are now looking forward to bigger and better things for the Society and for our membership. With new enthusiasm, we expect to see our dreams become a reality that will attract more participation in our endeavors, and to enhance the service we are able provide to our community and visitors.

MICRO MINI-MUSTER

On April 3 the Society sponsored a community outreach program for young tourists, ages 4 to 14. It was a work-intensive project for dedicated Society members: Hal Rover, Dick & Ginny Folkers, Bob & Carolyn Green, Brett & Rose Romer, Jackie Damron, Gary Olesen, and Dan Callahan.

Occasionally Marriott's Desert Springs Resort offers a special program for children of their guests called the "Campbell Kids Club." Eight fire safety-learning scenerios were set up by the Society, and 35 children participated under the watchful eyes of Marriott's consierge staff from 10 a.m. until noon. The kids did all the fire safety activities, saw Bob Green's 1948 white antique fire truck, the Society's Engine #1, and Station #33 of the Fire Department brought a fire engine and a medic truck.

BARBARA KEEDY EASTES AWARD

On May 11 the City of Palm Desert's posted agenda contained an item that attracted a large contingent of Society members. A valued member of our Board of Directors and new Vice-President (beginning July 1) was being honored for her 41 years of service in the College of the Desert bookstore. She was awarded a beautiful glass coffee table bowl from the City of Palm Desert by Councilman Crites. Congratulations, Barbara! Since her retirement we have seen more of her at the Society.

NEW MEMBERS

Contributing
Silver Spur Ranchers Association

Family
Andrea Miller-Keller
Hon. Lindsey Miller-Lerman
Jack & Marilyn Alt
Jane Brennan
Charles & Loraine Palmer

Supporting
Jon & Suzanne McBride
R. (Dorian) Paulson

Individual
Jessica Koran
Rich Frome
Christy Andersen
Julie A. Buchanan

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DECEASED MEMBERS

We are sorry to announce that we have lost a highly valued Society member, Kathleen Kopp. She and her husband, Douglas, have been Contributing Members for some time. Kim Housken, who will join our Board of Directors on July 1, is her daughter. Our sincere sympathy is extended to Kathleen's family and friends.

DONATIONS

Jackie Damron — items related to Palm Valley Country Club, dated 12-88 and 90

Eugene Conrotto: — a stack of Palm Desert Post issues dating from 1963 to 1967, also a 21" x 21" framed original air-brush cartoon of President John F. Kennedy & Father Maurice Chase shaking hands at Sacred Heart Church on 9-29-63. Details about this interesting collection will be printed in the Fall 2006 issue of the Hourglass.

A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Do you ever find yourself wondering what to get for a person who seems to have everything? We know of something that fits everyone and never has to be returned or exchanged. It will remind your friend or family member of your thoughtfulness with invitations to enjoyable social events, an informative newsletter about today and yesteryear, a chance to make new friends and meet delightful people, and opportunities to make their lives more meaningful in the community. That would be a bargain at any price, but you can give them all this and more with a membership to the Historical Society of Palm Desert for only $20.

I know of a lady who said she just didn't want to get involved. While her son was visiting, he was inspired to do something nice for his dear mother. He took out his checkbook and pen, wrote a check for $20, and gave it to the secretary at the Old Firehouse on El Paseo. Now this reticent lady knows everybody, gets out of the house on a regular basis, has many social contacts, and is a very productive member on the Society's Board of Directors. You can change a life ... you can give a Society membership to someone you care about.

CITY VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DINNER

Many community-minded members of the Society and other organizations around town were invited by the City of Palm Desert to an appreciation dinner at the Desert Willow clubhouse. It was an enjoyable event where old friends greeted each other and new friends were introduced. City staff members distributed mementos to each attendee and a scrumptious dinner was served. Desert Willow is the place to find food that looks as good as it tastes -- very high class in both departments. Society volunteers express their thanks to the City for their thoughtfulness ... we definitely feel appreciated.

SCHOOL TOURS

During May and June school tours were conducted at the Society for 509 students in the 2nd grade, and for 67 teachers and chaperones. Also one kindergarten class participated with 43 students, 23 teachers and chaperones. Hal Rover and Bob & Carolyn Green did most of the work, while John Marman, Dick Folkers, Adele Ruxton, Anne Tuttle, and Brett Romer filled-in when more help was needed.

May 9 & 10	Abraham Lincoln	May 19	Sacred Heart
May 15, June 5 & 6	Gerald Ford	June 1 & 2	George Washington
May 16 & 17	James Carter	June 8	Sacred Heart (K)

VOLUNTEERS -- THE HEART OF THE SOCIETY

Jean Ernst continues to chair this committee, and she is looking ahead to September 1st when the Society office will reopen after two months of being closed for the summer. If you have not participated in Society activities at the historic fire house, you are missing out on one of the greatest benefits of being a member. It's what we call "FAMILY" ... and it happens when you belong to a small group within a large group. You can fill a slot in our organization that was designed with you in mind, because you would be perfect as a greeter and communicator with people who come in to see what we have to look at, to hear, and to share. Maybe you would like to scan old magazines for early Palm Desert history. The jobs on the "TO DO" list are endless -- there is definitely something you would enjoy. A volunteer meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 3 at 3:00 p.m. at the fire house. Call Anne at 346--6588 and ask her to put your name on the list for our fresh start-up in September.

UPCOMING 2006-2007 EVENTS

Sept. 1	Office reopens	Jan. 7	Golf Cart Parade	Apr. 18	Spring Luncheon
Oct.	Mini-Muster (5 schools)	Jan. 26	1st of Lecture Series	Apr. 27	4th of Lecture Series
Oct. 3	Volunteer Mtg.- 3 p.m.	Feb. 23	2nd of Lecture Series	May 12	Founder's Day
Oct 18	Fall Luncheon	Mar. 23	3rd of Lecture Series		
Oct. 28-29	Annual Yard Sale	Mar. 25	Ed Mullins picnic		

Please Note: Some people think there is a connection between the Palm Desert Historical Commission and the Historical Society, but there is not. The commission members are appointed by the City Council; they review historical properties with the intent to preserve. The Society preserves local history in various collections and maintains a museum. Please explain to your friends that these are two totally separate organizations.

Is a Person Having a Stroke?

Can't stick tongue straight out -- it will go to the side.
Can't say a simple sentence like: "Isn't it a beautiful day."
Can't hold arms straight up.
Can't smile.

NETWORKING MEETING

On June 15 the Palm Desert Historical Society hosted 22 representatives of 13 local museums and societies. One of the topics discussed was a map which would point out the location of these entities, thus increasing awareness of residents and visitors to what is being offered for their information and enjoyment. Societies and museums in attendance were: Cabot's, Coachella Valley, Desert Hot Springs, Hamilton, Idyllwild, Indian Wells, La Quinta, Palm Springs, Palo Verde, General Patton, Riverside County, Palm Desert, and a media writer.

NOTES FROM BOARD MEETING

The last meeting was on May 23. Minutes from Mar. 14 & April 19 were approved. Also approved was a financial report covering money market, checking, cash flow, and breakdowns for various functions. The Desert Institute lecture series attracted about 20 persons per meeting. A list of people who are interested in working with the paper archives will be compiled. The Society parking lot has a new slurry seal, thanks to the City of Palm Desert. Previously proposed safety railings were discussed. During July and August the Society will be open for those who arrange for private guided tours by appointment. A June 20th joint meeting for both old and new board members is scheduled for 9:30 a.m.

New Officers:		Carry-over Board:	New Board members:	
Pres:	Dick Folkers	Beverly Bergh	Linda Carter	Kay McCune
Vice-Pres:	Barbara Keedy Eastes	Jean Ernst	Jackie Damron	Bob Pitchford
Sec:	Jackie Damron	Don Graybill	Kim Housken	
Treas:	Helene Harrison	Brett Romer	John Marman	
Past Pres:	Hal Rover	Lois Bradstreet		

Ginny Folkers, Hourglass editor

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